

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
Minutes, November 14, 2006
Donnelley Wildlife Management Area
Green Pond, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Sam Hiott, Tadpole Baldwin, Campbell Coxe, Lin Fore, Craig LeSchack, Craig Sasser, Stephen Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT: Carlyle Blakeney, Jr., Billy Ray Cato, Robin Inabinet, Phil Wilkinson, Parker Barnes, Jr.

DNR STAFF PRESENT: Breck Carmichael, Val Nash, Derrell Shipes, Jim Westerhold, Sam Chappellear, Bob Joyner, Dean Harrigal, Greg Hudson, Ross Catterton, Jamie Dozier, Walt Rhodes, Ed Duncan, Susan Johnson

Chair Hiott opened the meeting by asking Project Supervisor Dean Harrigal to give a brief overview of the Donnelley/Bear Island Wildlife Management Areas (WMA). Harrigal stated this area is located in the heart of the Ace Basin. Bear Island includes 12,055 acres purchased by the Agency in 1953. Harrigal further stated Bear Island is one of the oldest WMAs in the State and includes 5,500 acres of managed wetlands. Harrigal stated Donnelley consists of 8,048 acres. The Donnelley WMA was placed under DNR management in 1992; however the Agency did not take full ownership of the property until 2003. There are 800 acres of managed wetland impoundment complexes and 1,000 acres of backwaters, managed for various sources of waterfowl food. The Donnelley consists of approximately 5,000 acres of upland habitat. Donnelley and Bear Island WMAs represent a 20,000-acre complex that is managed for multiple wildlife species.

Chair Hiott encouraged Committee members to attend the tours of Donnelley and Bear Island following the meeting.

The minutes of the August 15, 2006 meeting were approved as submitted.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

There were no Advisory Committee member comments.

CONSTITUENT COMMENTS:

There were no constituent comments.

WATERFOWL WMA PEER REVIEW SCHEDULE AND PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS:

WFF Deputy Director Breck Carmichael outlined the peer review process for DNR waterfowl management areas that began approximately two years ago, under the auspices of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee. The first area to be reviewed was the Yawkey Wildlife Center in the spring of 2004. The Peer Review Committee issued a report of its findings and Bob Joyner, the Project Leader for Yawkey, and his staff have implemented many of the suggestions offered in the report.

The second peer review occurred in January 2005 on the Bear Island WMA, followed by peer reviews on the Samworth and Santee Coastal/Santee Delta WMAs.

Region IV Wildlife Coordinator Sam Chappelear provided status reports on the management activities resulting from each of the peer reviews (copies attached to the original minutes). Chappelear stated many accomplishments have occurred on these areas as a result of the Peer Review Committee's recommendations. He asked Committee Members to review the reports and let staff know if they had specific questions.

Carmichael distributed a table reflecting DNR's waterfowl management areas statewide, Category I (draw hunts only) and Category II (open on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, first come, first served), their location, the number of acres, and the primary habitat type on each area (copy attached to the original minutes).

Carmichael stated Bonneau Ferry WMA might be a good selection for the next peer review given the fact it is a newly acquired property and includes a history of waterfowl management. Another candidate would be the Sandy Beach WMA. Carmichael stated these were merely suggestions and would be left up to committee members to decide. Due to the absence of committee member Phil Wilkinson (who had participated in some of the peer reviews) Chair Hiott elected to defer further discussion until the February Waterfowl Advisory Committee meeting.

AVIAN INFLUENZA (AI) UPDATE:

Derrell Shiples, Wildlife Section Chief of Statewide Projects, Research and Survey, distributed a recent publication by DNR titled "What South Carolina Hunters Should Know About Avian Influenza" (copy attached to the original minutes). Shiples explained the Department of Homeland Security and USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services have made funds available to states in an effort to sample wild birds for AI. Shiples stated DNR has partnered with USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services and plans are to expend \$150,000 to \$175,000 in South Carolina this year sampling for AI in certain species of shorebirds and waterfowl. Species to be sampled have migratory routes that may include Asia or Europe, and/or they may have contact while migrating with birds from those areas.

Shiples stated DNR Biologist Felicia Sanders has recently captured between 200 and 300 shorebirds for sampling without injury to the birds, and several hundred hunter harvested waterfowl will be sampled at DNR waterfowl management areas. The purpose of the publication is to help in managing the message regarding AI. The publication will be available at DNR waterfowl hunts, and also be targeted to other bird hunters and hunters in general.

Shiples noted that low pathogenic strains of AI have been found in North America in ducks and shorebirds this year. This finding was not unexpected as there are many strains of AI in the environment continuously, and wild birds that are associated with water are natural reservoirs of AI. However, Shiples reminded committee members the

highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of AI that has occurred in Europe and Asia, and resulted in some human sickness and deaths, has yet to be found in North America. The surveillance-testing program that SCDNR, and virtually all other state natural resource agencies in the U.S. are assisting with, is intended to detect the virus early if it arrives here. Shipes further stated this disease, in its current form, is not easily transmitted to humans. Overseas human cases have been in situations where people and infected poultry were living in close proximity. However, a slight mutation in the virus could allow it to more easily infect humans.

There was some concern expressed by Committee Members that unwarranted alarm may be created when waterfowl hunters see DNR personnel wearing gloves and collecting the AI samples. Millions of dollars are expended in the State on waterfowl hunting and management, and hysteria created by fears of AI could have a negative impact. Chair Hiott stated he realizes the sensitivity of the issue, and getting the proper message out is important. Shipes reiterated that DNR staff will be diligent in making sure the public is properly informed, and the distribution of the AI brochure will assist in that endeavor.

Shipes stated he will continue to update the Committee on the sampling effort.

GOVERNOR'S WOOD DUCK BOX PROGRAM UPDATE:

DNR Biologist Walt Rhodes stated the January 2006 wood duck box distribution included 163 cooperators with 784 boxes being distributed. Rhodes has received 157 applications for wood duck boxes for distribution in 2007. DNR budgeted to construct 1,000 boxes this fall. The lumber has been delivered to the prison where the boxes are constructed and work is underway. Rhodes further stated the bidding process for the predator guards has been completed. Committee member Baldwin inquired about whether or not some type of recyclable plastic could be used in constructing predator guards rather than the galvanized sheet metal currently used. Rhodes stated that using plastic has not been researched but UV problems could occur with some plastics.

Distribution of the boxes should go as planned in January. Chair Hiott asked about the process of notifying applicants as to wood duck box distribution. Rhodes explained each applicant is mailed a letter notifying them of the distribution centers and the date and time the boxes can be retrieved. Chair Hiott inquired about the success of the program and Rhodes stated it is a very popular program for DNR, especially from a public relations point of view. When asked about the maintenance of the boxes, Rhodes stated he sends recipients a notice when it is time to change the shavings in their boxes prior to the nesting season. Recipients of the boxes are also sent data cards in the spring to complete and return to DNR for monitoring purposes.

SATELLITE TELEMETRY PROJECT UPDATE:

Walt Rhodes gave a power point presentation updating the Committee on the satellite telemetry project. Rhodes stated the project began in 2003 and overall objectives of the project were to assess the breeding habits of pintails and mallards, to determine the chronology and movement of their migration and identify spring and fall staging areas.

Rhodes stated in February 2006, ten hen mallards were marked, five at the Broad River WMA and five at Santee National Wildlife Refuge. Nine radios remained active and those birds migrated in the spring. Most birds went through the Great Lakes region, with several settling there for the spring and summer. Some continued west to Minnesota and Saskatchewan and some went into Ontario. Two birds were lost in late May, early June. Another bird was lost in July. Contact still occurred with six birds as fall migration began. One bird was shot in early November in SW Ontario. At the present time five birds have started moving south.

Rhodes stated no additional satellite work is planned for the winter. He asked committee members if they had suggestions for biologists to consider from a research standpoint i.e., more satellite work, local radio telemetry, etc.

Committee Member Fore asked about satellite work regarding wood ducks. Rhodes stated technology is not such that wood ducks can be marked because of their small size. Dean Harrigal stated biologists do need population information on wood ducks produced in South Carolina. Harrigal feels the best way to collect this information is through pre-season banding, from July 1 until the beginning of duck season, September 25. Harrigal further stated it is quite difficult to catch juvenile wood ducks to band. Harrigal also mentioned another difficulty is finding locations to pre-season band wood ducks throughout the State. He asked committee members to let him know if they had knowledge of areas with good wood duck populations in July, August and September and if landowners in those areas would be willing to allow biologists access to the wood ducks.

Chair Hiott stated contacting recipients of wood duck boxes through the Governor's Wood Duck Box Project might be a good place to begin locating landowners willing to participate with staff in this endeavor.

DNR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

Breck Carmichael stated the DNR Board had not yet approved the Agency's legislative proposal for 2007. Carmichael stated the Agency's budget is at the top of the list of priorities with plans to request just under \$24 million. Another important priority is for the Agency to obtain regulatory authority on leased Wildlife Management Area lands. The Agency also has plans for the introduction of a bill regarding South Carolina's Waterfowl Stamp as the Agency has gone to point-of-sale licenses. With licenses being purchased electronically, it becomes impossible to give the purchaser an actual stamp. This legislation would allow an individual to purchase a duck stamp and the purchase is indicated on the license. Should individuals choose to have the actual stamp, one can be mailed to the individual but would not have to be in their possession to hunt.

Carmichael further stated last year a bill was passed reducing the number of game zones in South Carolina from 11 to 6, with a one-year delay in being implemented (fall 2007). As a result of the reduction in game zones, several code sections in Title 50 will need to be corrected.

Another bill the Agency is pursuing is establishing size and creel limits on a number of species of saltwater fish.

DNR's Law Enforcement Division is pursuing boating legislation defining houseboats in an effort to require houseboats to have proper sewage disposal and be properly registered.

Carmichael stated the Agency is also pursuing legislation to set up a private lands alligator harvest permit program.

Committee Member Sasser asked about South Carolina looking into pursuing some type of legislation penalizing resident hunters who are issued hunting violations in other states. Carmichael stated this topic has been discussed in the law enforcement community regarding multi-state cooperatives. Chair Hiott asked if this topic could be discussed at the next meeting.

RE-IMPOUNDMENT OF BROKEN DIKE AREAS:

Ed Duncan, Environmental Program Director for the DNR, gave a presentation on the history and current status of re-impounding old ricefields. He stated that prior to the early 1970's few regulations applied, and the principal issue was of ownership of the tidelands and potential blockage of navigable waters. However, during the mid and late 1970's, the Clean Water Act and Coastal Zone Management Act were passed. These Acts established programs for regulating alterations of coastal wetlands, and required anyone wishing to do so to apply for a permit. Permit applications to re-impound old ricefields became very contentious, and most applications were denied. Those that were issued were generally appealed. Duncan stated in the mid 1980's, the SC Supreme Court ruled that permits could not be issued unless an over-riding public interest could be established. Since that time, there have been no significant efforts to acquire permission to re-impound any old ricefields. However, the interest in ricefield re-impoundment has again increased. Duncan presented an executive summary of a recent review of legal issues regarding tideland ownership and navigable water blockage (copy attached to the original minutes). The summary was prepared by Ken Woodington, former tideland counsel for the SC Office of the Attorney General. It concluded that clearing the legal hurdles on the issues is very difficult, but not always impossible. It was also reported that the state permitting programs are currently more receptive to considering re-impoundment proposals, but there was little hope of obtaining approval from the federal agencies. Discussion followed and the subject was carried over to the next meeting.

WAC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

Due to time constraints, the Committee postponed this topic and would like for it to be the first item on the agenda for the February meeting.

OTHER NEW/OLD BUSINESS:

There were no comments

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

February 13, 2006, 10:00AM (tentative location at the Columbia DNR office).

As the meeting closed, Yawkey Wildlife Center Project Leader Bob Joyner announced his retirement in June 2007 and introduced his replacement, Jamie Dozier.